

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

553 This celebration could also take place in the case of a married couple who have had no children for a considerable length of time, and suddenly have a girl, whom they would like to value as a boy. A man who had no children from his first wife could also celebrate the 'sobou' of his first child—a daughter, from his second wife. The 'sobou' ceremony for the succeeding boys is usually held by the comparatively well-to-do people, and one cannot fail to note the social significance of the celebrations. It is a display of one's economic ability to be able to afford killing a ram and offering wheat bread and vegetables. Thus the continuing of 'sobou' ceremony for all the boys adds to one's social prestige.

[554] The third stage of his introduction is the 'balila food' with other children after the end of the forty days. Though nothing outstanding happens during the meal, the implication is that the child, finishing his 'angelic period', would mix with these children later.

851 The fourth stage is the formal and informal visits of the mother and child to other people or the latter coming to her house with presents.

846 It has been mentioned that during the first forty days the child remains in the closest contact with its mother practically throughout the whole of its waking as well as sleeping hours as she lies beside it on the mat. During most of this period the mother nurses the child while she is facing it. This close bodily proximity establishes the first educational relationship for the child. Yet this is not the sole relationship, even at this period, for the importance of other people for the child's education is symbolized by the act of 'teaching' (talkeen). For this purpose 'a good man' or 'a good woman' is chosen to perform this act with the boy or the girl respectively. The chosen person eats from a sweet thing, either a date or a piece of sugar, which would then be given to the child to suck, and this is followed by prayers for the child. Through the 'talkeen' the character of the 'good man or woman' is supposed to be transmitted to the baby. When the child grows older reference to the person who 'taught' him usually crops up in assessing his character and temperament.

846 The disposal of the child's navel cord during the first forty days is of special social significance. After cutting the boy's navel cord, the father takes it to the field, there to eat some previously prepared food. After the meal, the father buries the cord in one of the divisions of the field. The income of this section is appropriated, at least theoretically, to the boy, and his 'luck' is gauged according to the yield of that area. Sometimes the boy's cord is buried below the threshold of the Kuttab (the village Koran School) as father to the wish that he would go to the Kuttab to 'memorize the Koran'. In the case of a girl, the navel cord is buried below the threshold of the house or kept in a small box. It is quite obvious that the difference in the disposal of the navel cord reflects the distinction between the prospective spheres of work for the two sexes.

854 In discussing the early training of the child during the first three years, the first important feature that looms large is the close physical proximity

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING:

not only during the first forty days but which is also sustained till the arrival of the next baby. According to the family structure in the village, there are invariably at least two grown-up women attending to the rearing of the child, or sharing in the child's care, e.g. maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother, sisters, paternal or maternal aunts, or brothers' wives. As the newly born baby, or even any child, has no special cradle, cot, or bed, it always sleeps beside the mother or sits on her lap. After the forty days it may be picked up by relatives. 854

During the third and fourth month, the child is usually held horizontally with the mother's hands underneath its legs and head. During the fourth month it is held vertically, supported under the arms, and can be carried against the mother's breast, being supported with her hands under the buttocks. During the fifth month, he is normally held astride the mother's hip.

Nursing is one of the first basic needs of the child which in this community conforms to no schedule. It is guided only by two principles. The first is that the child is given the breast whenever it cries. The second is that it is suckled when the breast becomes 'compassionate', in other words when the mother's breast becomes full. It is said that when there is 'compassion' in the breast the child is hungry, and therefore the mother must offer it to her baby. The reciprocity between the baby's need and the breast is recognized to be one of the determining factors in suckling. It is true that in Silwa, as in Artas, the mother's breast is the symbol of compassion.¹ Nothing is more binding in the mother-child relationship than the memories of 'stomach enveloping' and 'breast-feeding' which are symbols invoked by mothers to remind their sons or daughters to be obedient, or to come to their help in old age. 'I enveloped you for nine months and have fed you with my breast' is supposed to be one of the most effective and compelling entreaties. In this connection, Ali related the story of the Caliph Harun al Rashid and Gafar al Barmaki, his vizier, whom the former decided to kill, and imprison or disperse the rest of his family, after he feared that they were plotting to remove him from the Caliphate. Harun carried out his decisions in spite of the entreating of Gafar's mother, who had breast-fed the Caliph and who had implored him by the milk she gave him, and the locks of his hair she had cut off and kept with her. 'This is', remarked Ali, 'an example of tyranny that overrides one's duties towards his breast-feeder who is like a mother.' 853 •

It is because women can provide their babies with milk that they are considered to be endowed with compassion. This is one of the tangible arguments for the value of having girls, who would be a source of compassion not only for their children, but also for their parents. [826] [593]

The time and frequency of suckling varies from day to day and from child to child. A child who often cries is regarded as a weakling and hence its need for more suckling. A mother of a four-month-old child, who was [842] [562]

¹ H. Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs*, p. 107.

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

- 853 asked to count the number of times she suckled her child over a week, reported that it varied between six and fifteen times a day. The time of each nursing varies, but it is admitted that the longer the child cries the greater the time the mother spends on its suckling.

[1091] The dress of women actually helps in nursing the child without delay immediately he cries. Either through the dress neck opening, which is always cut low, or the two openings, one on each breast, the mother extrudes her breast for the child. Sometimes in the presence of female strangers, or very close male relatives, the child is nursed while covered with the top garment, the breast and the child hidden between the two garments. The mother usually offers the nipple between her middle and index fingers to the child who eagerly leans towards it and grasps it. The suckling child is allowed to play freely with his mother's breast, even while alternating from one breast to another. A mother nurses her child while she is sewing, spinning, cooking or even eating. When the child grows older it can induce its mother to nurse it by rubbing its head on her breast or by inserting its hand into one of the openings.

Usually the child suckles till it is satisfied, but it also happens that the nipple is withdrawn from it whenever the mother feels that it is satisfied, or when she has to engage on an immediate task, to give it the breast later. It is worthwhile noting that the child gets the breast either when it needs it or when the breast is full, and it is withdrawn from it when it is satisfied, or when its mother feels that she has got to withdraw her breast when circumstances of her work demand it. Yet the need of the child, even theoretically, is the overriding factor in suckling. Occasions of tantalizing with the breast are reported when mothers show or play about with their breast for their children, the game invariably ending with the suckler getting the breast. It is forbidden (haram) to deprive the child of the breast once it has been tantalized. Some women in the village are known to be neglectful of their children with regard to nursing. They are reported as saying that if they attend wholly to their children, as other women do, they would not be able to attend to their home tasks. Their justification for this is implicit in their famous saying, 'Even dogs, after all, have brought forth offspring'.

862 The period of nursing, on the whole, varies from child to child and from mother to mother, depending on the health of the child or the arrival of the next baby, or on the mother's milk. No child is ever weaned before the end of the first year. Some children are suckled for two years and a few as long as three years. The average period for most children is between a year and a year and a half. It is reported also that very few mothers nurse two children at the same time, and this custom was more common about twenty years ago, when the period of suckling was longer on the whole.

853 It is felt in the village that there is a definite relationship between
842 lactation and future pregnancy, and if a woman wishes to become pregnant,

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

she curtails her nursing period but never before the termination of the first year. In this case, the 'milking goat', whose milk is preferred to that of a cow, being 'lighter', would help in feeding the child. My female informant insisted that the contrary never occurs, that a woman prolongs her nursing period to prevent pregnancy. At this point the official ideology of women differs from that in Artas as stated by Granqvist in the following quotation:

'As it is generally assumed that nursing makes a new pregnancy more difficult it may be thought that the women use it in self-protection, to postpone the unwished-for pregnancy. Women's work is so hard that it is almost unbelievable that they should wish to be constantly bearing children.'

The writer has enquired whether the same is being practised in Silwa, but he was assured the opposite. His informant might have wanted to hide this fact, as the logical conclusion of the relationship between conception and lactation lends itself to its use in the self-protective way mentioned by Granqvist. The informant added that it is the child's indisputable right to suck as long as it wants, otherwise it would become obstinate and disobedient, and it is only to pursue the more desired aim of fresh pregnancy that the mother is obliged to curtail the nursing period.

It is also recognized that a boy is usually nursed less than a girl, which also differs from the custom in Artas. The purpose is that though both should be infused with the mother's compassion, the girl is supposed to be imbued with more of it than the boy, and consequently her nursing should be longer. Yet if a newly-married woman begets a girl in her first birth, the custom is to curtail her nursing period in order to hurry the next pregnancy in the hope of begetting a boy. The short period of boys' nursing compared to that of girls' is also a clear indication of the accelerating process of boys' growth. The case of the boy who is brought up by a widow and nursed for a long time is a proverbial one for 'his unreliability, his being easily swayed, and his inability to make up his mind'. Any person who evidences such character traits is designated as one who was brought up by a widow.¹

The different claims of the patrilineal and the matrilineal sides on the infant express themselves in the assumed different attitudes between father and mother with regard to weaning. While mothers consider a long period of suckling as conducive to compassion, fathers regard it as 'darkening the infant's mind'. This difference in attitude towards weaning could be taken as a reflection of the matrilineal sentiment, contrasted with the paternal desire of subjecting the infant to social discipline as early as possible.²

What is also significant is the rigid observance of the nursing of the child by his relatives. One of the main injunctions of the *Koran* is the pro-

¹ It also means that he has not been disciplined by his father as will be shown later.

² See Chapter II.

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

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582 Inhibition of incestuous marriage between boys and girls who have been nursed from the same breast (foster brothers and sisters). A few incidents occur of women nursing other women's children, even when the mothers are alive, but only for special reasons, e.g. when the mother's milk is not sufficient, or when a mother has a thin underweight baby, giving hers to a fat mother with fat babies. The incidents are known, and the marriage taboo is observed. Yet such wet-nursing rarely occurs among close relatives, where future intermarriage of children is anticipated.

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828 Significant, too, is the belief that character traits can be transmitted through the mother's milk. This is mainly emphasized by the mother's folk. Through the mother's milk the child becomes like his maternal uncles. 'If the child becomes like his maternal uncle, then he is worth praising, if he becomes like his father it is better to throw him in the sea.' The paternal side, while admitting the influence of the mother, teasingly imputes the unusual traits to her, while the strong traits are traced to the father's people. 'If the boy is not a good boy, two-thirds of his character is attributed to his maternal uncles; if he is a capable boy, then he has done no injustice to his father.'

However justifiable the claims may seem, the mother's milk is recognized as a very important factor in determining the child's character. The advice given to a man in search of a wife is to 'search for the maternal uncles of his children', as the boys would be like them through the influence of the mother's breast. With regard to this, Ali told me that the ancestor of the village (as well as other villages), G'afar, is of a higher rank of honour compared with Abdullah ibn al Zubair, the grandfather of another group of villages in the same province of Aswan. The reason is that though the two grandfathers are relatives of the Prophet of the same degree, yet the latter is not on the same level of honour because his mother and maternal uncles were slaves, while the former is of doubly honourable parentage. It is also said that 'as the roots spread and feed surreptitiously one has to choose the maternal uncles for his children'.

In this light, it is appropriate to discuss Granqvist's statement that the Arab families having Negro servants are afraid to let their children be wet-nursed by one of them, because they might acquire that 'unreasonable crossness' which they claim to characterize the Negroes. In Silwa the fear extends not only to Negroes, but to any strangers 'whose origin is not known', and who might interfere with the purity of the child's character by making it unstable, as homogeneous origin leads to a consistent and reliable character. To say that a certain person 'has origin' is to commend him, while saying he is a 'mixture' is to condemn his character. Evidence is seen in the fear of the villagers to have any mixture in either wet-nursing, or marriage, with the family of carpenters, potters and water-carriers.

582 Though the people of these families are lighter in skin than the villagers, and many of them comparatively well-to-do, they are considered as aliens and their origin is unknown. The case of the daughter of a village man

BIRTH, INFANCY AND EARLY TRAINING

who married a member of the carpenter family is usually a source of gossip and warning against such mixture. 582

In pursuing the subject of infant nursing, it is to be noted that the child does not rely entirely on mother's milk during all its nursing period, as after the fourth month it is introduced to pre-masticated adult food. The bits that cannot be swallowed are collected and inserted again in its mouth. Premasticated food is used more in the case of boys than girls, to help mother's milk in accelerating growth. 853

During nursing it is quite common to see a child sucking his fingers or pushing his fist into his mouth. He is actually encouraged in doing this by his mother, who sometimes puts her own finger into the child's mouth. The need is recognized more during the teething period, that is in the fourth or fifth month. For this purpose of sucking, the mother hangs a kind of loose string round the neck of the child with a bundle of hard stuff tied in a piece of cloth, and this is supposed to assist tooth-cutting. 856

When the mother starts weaning her child, she increases the amount of pre-masticated food given to it. She begins by weaning her child first from one breast, and later from the other. She stops milk from the breast by rubbing the nipple with a concoction of spices, ground sheep tripe, henna, cactus juice and salt stone. After 'stopping milk' the mother turns her dress back to front so that its neck and side openings hang at the back, the child thus finding no access to the breast. For the first two days of weaning, coloured hard-boiled eggs are given to the child to play with and then to eat, whenever he wishes. In psycho-analytical language, mothers in Silwa recognize weaning as a 'traumatic experience' for the child and do their best to absorb the child's attention in other directions, especially in play with other children or providing it with some delicacies of food. 862

The weaning must always be arranged in such a way that it is completed in two or three days before the beginning of the lunar month. It is believed to be very difficult to wean a child after the appearance of the new moon, and it must be left till towards the end of it. It is also believed that a woman who weans at the beginning of the month will find it difficult to bear children. This must be also observed in connection with the circumcision of girls, so that the girl will not become sterile or find it difficult to conceive. Here, one notes the striking relation between the moon and such social phenomena as weaning and circumcision. One might be led to infer that the moon must have been connected with fertility rites in some periods of Egyptian history. It is also observed by mothers that weaning of their children must not be declared immediately, but after a lapse of at least two weeks for fear of the evil eye, or 'pressure' on the mother's power to conceive. [82] [842] [304] [82]

The third basic need of the child, after the mother's bodily warmth and nursing, is the need for 'evacuation'. For the first four months (before the child can sit up) it is allowed to urinate and defaecate in a piece of cloth wrapped round its body from the waist to the knees, under its 854

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

865 universal experience when a mother has more than one child in her own
593 care'.¹ The peculiar side of it in this community is the way it is acknowledged and its use as an incentive in child development. In this treatment of the manifestations of sibling rivalry and the important part it plays in the formation of personality, no test of the Levy type was administered, but the cultural symbols and condensations were taken to offer ready-made data comparable to Levy's projective test.²

It is assumed in Silwa that the knee-baby is always jealous of the lap-baby, and the yard-baby is jealous of the knee-baby, and that this jealousy is irrespective of sex.³ The absolute order of birth is maintained as the source of sibling rivalry and in the case of the death of the knee-baby, for example, the yard-baby will not be jealous of the lap-baby. The process is thus juxtapositional, each child always rivalling the immediately younger one who is 'above him' and who is also described as the one 'who pushes him away'. Jealousy is also believed to be one-way, as expressed in the apprehensiveness of the older towards the younger, and not the converse, and therefore it is always the older who is jealous of the younger.

[152] It is considered, according to one of my female informants, that sibling rivalry is essential in the process of a child's growth, particularly for the boys. In the case of the first child, the mother usually induces him to suckle by offering her breast to a strange child. My informant went on to tell me of the folk story of the mother who had only one child and did not bear any more. At the age of seven, however, her son displayed the physical and social maturity of a child of four, being a weakling who knew nothing about the world. This retarded growth worried his mother who consulted various people as to the best way of treating him. At last, she was advised by an old woman to send him to another household, which had many children in it, in another village and to keep him there for a year. During the first few weeks the boy used to sit with the other children round a dish of food, without getting sufficient to eat. Thus he was almost starved, his condition deteriorating. After that period, however, his rivalry with the other children was stimulated and he began to compete with them in eating, playing and running errands. Through this method his development accelerated, and as he became lively his mother took him back home.

865 [153] It is believed that the arrival of a newborn baby helps to free the next oldest baby from his mother and thus assist its weaning, otherwise it would 'stick to its mother's neck'. As the terminal baby, or, as it is sometimes

¹ See William Henry, 'The Thematic Apperception Technique in the Study of Culture-Personality Relations', in *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, Vol. XXXV. See also Susan Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children*, London, 1937.

² Benjamin D. Paul, 'Symbolic Sibling Rivalry in a Guatemalan Indian Village', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LII, 1950, p. 205.

³ These stages of child development are adapted by Margaret Mead, 'Age Patternings in Personality Development', in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. XVII, 1947, pp. 230-40.

PERSONAL DECORATION AND ORNAMENTS

being treated in this manner, and it seemed to be a somewhat painful process. However, "*Il faut souffrir pour être belle*," and these women do endure considerable discomfort in the course of their toilet.

The toffee-like substance described above is also used by women in a similar way in order to pull out any hairs that may be growing on their legs.

Most women and girls paint round the eyes with antimony (Arabic, *kohl*). It is kept in a small bottle, generally of glass, called *mikhaleh*, and is applied with a short stick with a blunt point. It is regarded not only as a beautifier, but also as a cure for sore eyes.

Scent is used by both sexes, some of it being of a very pungent nature. In some parts of Egypt it is taboo for a man to use scent while his wife is suckling her child. If he disobey this rule the child, it is said, will come out all over in spots. A man whom I knew well used some scent on one occasion while his wife was still suckling their youngest-born. The child got nasty spots all over its body, and the mother told me that it was her husband's fault, because he had been putting some scent on his moustache!

I have sometimes heard English people remark on the dirty habit that the Egyptian peasant women have of wearing long dresses which trail over the ground, brushing up the dust in clouds as they go along. It is, of course, a very insanitary practice, but the wearing of short skirts would be looked upon as most immodest. A woman's legs should never be exposed, except from dire necessity. There is also another reason for the trailing skirts. Most peasant women walk barefooted, and so leave clearly defined footprints in the dry, dusty soil. A woman can be injured magically through her footprints, and so the long skirt acts as a safeguard, brushing over and thus obliterating them.

Little girls wear very bright-coloured cotton frocks, which reach almost to the ground (see Fig. 17). The women and older girls may wear such frocks indoors, but when they walk abroad, either to shop, to fill their water-jars, or to visit their friends, they wear a long black dress over the coloured one, and a thick veil, shawl-shaped, over their heads.

I was told by a friend some few years ago that in Sharkīyeh Province the women wear long white veils, on which are several gold or silver ornaments. These ornaments are in the form of

THE FELLÄHIN OF UPPER EGYPT

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843 minutes after the death of the person to whom it belongs. Another
821 explanation of falling stars is that they are darts aimed by God
761 at unbelievers. Lane says¹ that they are believed to be darts
F thrown by God at evil *ginn*, usually called 'afarit.

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846 Certain precautions must be taken by a woman after she has
given birth to a child. A woman who has lately lost her baby must
not enter the room where a woman is being confined, nor for seven
days after this event. If this taboo is broken the woman who was
F last confined will have no milk for her baby.

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761 If a cat gives birth to kittens which all die, and a woman gives
845 birth to a child in the same house in which the cat had its kittens,
853 the cat must be taken away from the house or the baby may die.
825 Or, if it lives, the mother will have no milk.

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789 Near a small village in Asyūt Province there is a stone, roughly
853 conical in shape, standing in the fields, and surrounded by what-
778 ever crops are being cultivated on that spot. It is said that men
have often tried to dig it up, excavating to a considerable depth all
round it, but no one has ever been able to come to the bottom of
the stone. It is believed by the peasants to be very ancient. A
certain mystery is attached to it because of these beliefs, thereby
doubtless enhancing its magical value. Women who have not
enough milk with which to nurse their children visit this stone on
a Friday. They must not speak when coming to and going away
from the spot, and they should step over it, still preserving absolute
silence, seven times. After this, it is believed, they will have no
difficulty in suckling their infant. I was told that the stone has
been visited for this purpose, among others, for a hundred years
or more.

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846 If a woman or child brings meat to a house where there is a
262 woman who has a child under seven days old that person must
789 not go into the mother's room, but the latter must come out of
853 her room and step over the meat three times. If she does not do
this she will have no milk.

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846 When a woman who is a Christian, whether Copt, Protestant,
854 or of any other denomination, has given birth to a child her
776 relatives take some wheat flour and mix it with water. Out of
774 this dough they make several crosses, sticking them on the walls
784 of the room occupied by the mother and child. The greatest

¹ The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians (London, 1871), vol. i,
p. 283.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927

MR13 Fellahin MR13

Upper Egypt

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

in number, sometimes of different colours, are procured, and a different name is inscribed on each. All these candles are lighted at once, and the name on the candle which burns the longest is the one eventually bestowed on the child. After it has received a name the birth is entered in the Government archives, the name of the child's mother only being given; the father's name is not entered at all. 553
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Boys are more highly valued than girls, and special precautions have to be taken when a male child is born to protect him from the evil eye. Sometimes the midwife is bribed to keep the sex of the child a secret, and if she is paid a sufficiently large sum of money she will consent to give out to the villagers that the child is a girl. I was told of a case of a woman who had given birth to a boy not knowing the sex of the child until it was thirty days old or more, and her husband was equally ignorant. 842
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As a further protection from the evil eye a boy is often dressed as a girl for two years or so, all the villagers, presumably, being led to think that the child is a girl. 754
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Women are supposed to suckle their children for two years, but if a woman again conceives before the end of this period she must, of course, wean her last-born child. When this happens she hangs a 'date of jealousy' round the child's neck to prevent its being jealous of the baby when it is born. I once witnessed a most frantic display of jealousy on the part of a very young child when he saw his mother with the newly arrived infant in her arms. He flung himself upon her in a fury of envious rage. The 'dates of jealousy' in some parts of Egypt are acorns; in other parts they are made of a kind of earth moulded into the form of a date stone. 853
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If a child cries very much the mother will sometimes purchase a very small copy of the Korān and hang it round the child's neck. It is believed that if the child begins to cry and then looks at the Korān which it is wearing it will immediately stop weeping. Such small editions of this sacred book are also worn by a child to keep it well and to ensure its living. When used for this purpose the book is sewn up in a cotton case. 854
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If, after long waiting, a woman at last bears a son a festival, or *mūlid*, is held. There are various kinds of *mawlid* (plural of *mūlid*) held for different reasons and on various occasions, and among them is that held in celebration of the birth of a son. It is a kind of thanksgiving on the part of the parents, and is also 527
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FERTILITY RITES

Women also come here if they are experiencing difficulty in suckling their children, and donkeys which are not producing sufficient milk for their young are likewise driven here. The ceremony is the same as that for childlessness, and after its performance the milk is supposed to be much increased in quantity. 718
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Many years ago my brother, Dr A. M. Blackman, recorded a custom of hanging skins of foxes over the doors of houses in Lower Nubia.¹ On inquiry he found that they were believed to be charms "to protect the women of the household, preventing miscarriages, and helping them in labour." In some parts of Egypt if a mother wants another child she will attach a small piece of fox's skin to the head of her last-born living child. After doing this she hopes that her wish will be granted. [191]
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The pollen of a male palm is used as a charm to produce fertility; some of it is mixed in water, which is drunk by the woman who wishes to have a child. The fertilization of the female palm with such pollen might naturally account for the belief in its efficacy as a charm to cure a woman of barrenness. [824]

It is believed that if a woman who has lately had a child goes to see another woman who has recently given birth to a child which did not survive, the latter will not conceive again. The happy mother whose child lives must wait until her friend's child has been dead for fifteen days, when all danger of seeing her will be over. However, should such an unfortunate visit be paid before the fifteen days have expired, the bereaved mother must counteract the danger of future childlessness by visiting the tomb of her dead child and going through the ceremony of stepping over its body already described. She may as an alternative choose one of the other rites for the same purpose. [789]
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I will now describe some of the methods employed to prevent conception. One I have mentioned already in connexion with the stones in and beside the pool. If an expectant mother wishes to have no more children for a certain period she will take the seeds of a castor-oil plant and, on the day after her child is born, she will eat one of the seeds if she wishes to be without another child for one year, two if for two years, and so on. This is believed to be invariably effective. If a woman has a spite against another who wishes to have a child she may secretly insert some castor-oil seeds into her food, and so render her unable to conceive. [754]
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¹ *Man*, vol. ix (1909), pp. 9 f.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927

MR13 Fellahin MR13

Upper Egypt

AGRICULTURE AND HARVEST RITES

In some parts of Upper Egypt the following customs are observed²⁴³ in connexion with the cultivation of *dura* (maize) only. A *dura*-field is irrigated by means of a water-wheel or a *shādūf* ten times, and when the water has been conveyed to the fields for the last time the owner, or one of his family, brings to the field *faṣīr* (a kind of sweet pastry), or *kunāfeh* (fine macaroni), or *rashteh*²⁶²₂₆₄ (macaroni cooked in milk). He then stands on one of the pillars of the water-wheel or *shādūf* and cries to his neighbours in the field, "Come and eat," firing his gun at the same time. Such firing takes place regularly at weddings, or on any joyous occasion. After the food has been eaten the owner of the field plucks some of the heads of the *dura*-plants and places them on one of the empty food plates. This he presents to whichever member of his family brought the food. He then returns to the field and plucks four heads of *dura*, which are fastened on the foreheads of the two oxen or buffaloes which worked the water-wheel. The animals are then driven home, and all who see them will know by the heads of *dura* decorating their foreheads that the irrigation of their owner's field of *dura* is finished.

When a *shādūf* is used for raising the water the owner plucks a head of *dura* for each *shādūf* that has been used for irrigating his field. The *dura* is attached to the arms (or levers) of the *shawādīf* which, like the cattle, are brought home thus decorated with the maize.

The last time of irrigating a field of *dura* is called *el-fiṭāmeḥ*, which means the act of weaning. The same name is given to the¹⁸⁵³ last occasion on which a mother suckles her child.

In many of the provinces of Upper Egypt, when the *dura* or wheat or barley has been threshed the heaps of grain are left standing on the threshing-floor all night. But before sunset, when the work is completed, the owner of the grain brings some food to the¹⁸³¹₂₆₄¹⁷⁸⁹



FIG. 101. A SICKLE

243

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927

MR13 Fellahin MR13●

Upper Egypt
Ancient EGYPT MR5

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ANALOGIES

In modern Egypt a child is suckled for two years (p. 81); in ancient Egypt, according to the passage in the *Wisdom of Anii* quoted on p. 283, it was not weaned till it was three years old.

On p. 82, in describing the slaughter of a victim at a festival held on behalf of a child, I stated that the animal was placed on its back and its throat cut, and that a quantity of the blood was preserved in a bowl. Victims were slain exactly in this manner at ancient Egyptian festivals. In almost every decorated tomb chapel they are depicted extended on their backs with the butchers cutting their throats. Occasionally in these scenes an assistant is

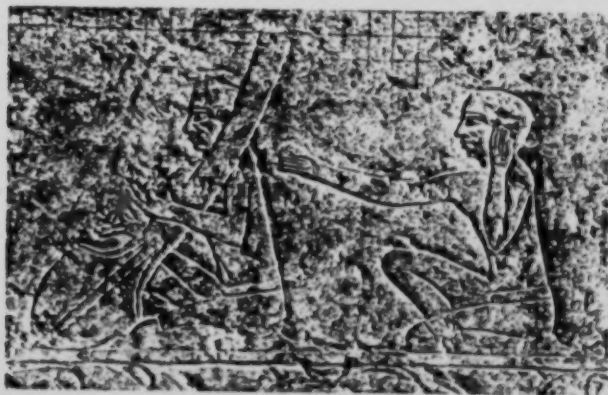


FIG. 160. ANCIENT HARPER AND VOCALIST
After A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, Part II, Pl. III.

shown holding a large bowl,¹ evidently to catch the blood (Fig. 159). Did the practice of smearing the door with blood exist in Egypt as far back as the Old Kingdom? The blood was evidently required for some ceremonial purpose, otherwise what need would there have been for the basin?

To sing or recite with one hand laid against a side of the face and the other hand extended (p. 82) is a very ancient practice (Fig. 160), and so, too, is the throwing of one's clothes about as a sign of admiration and rejoicing (p. 83). Thus in one of the *Pyramid Texts*,² dating from about 2600 B.C., we read how the dead king, having reached the celestial realm of the sun-god,

¹ A. M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, Part I (London, 1914), Pl. XI; cf. also Part IV (London, 1924), p. 27; P. Montet, *Les scènes de la vie privée dans les tombeaux égyptiens de l'ancien empire* (Strassburg, 1925), p. 165.

² K. Sethe, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, Spruch 518.

843 avoids looking at any dead person, and gazes on portraits of handsome men, perhaps magazine cuttings that she has pinned on the wall. She must be able to eat what she likes. If she is thwarted, the child will be seriously affected.

846 Immediately after birth the baby is put in a basket, 783 which serves as a cradle, and is not washed for seven days. [852] The first bath has a ritual significance of purification. It is given by the midwife, and the water is poured from a pot (*abrig*) specially kept for this purpose, with different ornamentation for a girl and for a boy. The mother is technically impure for thirty or forty days after, according as the child is a girl or a boy. These Moslem customs are also found in Morocco.

844 If at the moment of birth the father is working in the [431] fields, and the child is a son, a friend will run and tell him the good news, for which he can claim a gift. This tradition recalls a text in Jeremiah: 'Cursed be the man who took the tidings to my father, saying to him "A son is born", and who filled him with joy'. (Ch. XX, v.15).

177 As soon as the child is born, a blue bead is hung round 751 his neck to turn away the evil eye. For the same reason the boy of whom his parents are so proud may be dressed like a girl, till he is weaned. His mother will give him suck for two years at least, at far too frequent intervals, thus 853 causing gastric troubles. This is the length of time favoured 842 by the ancient Egyptians, by the black peoples of Africa, 586 and by Koranic precept: "Divorced mothers shall give suck to their children for two full years" (Sura II, 233). The peasant women think that by weaning late they will delay another pregnancy.

854 When the time comes for her to go out — and this hap- 482 pens very soon — she carries the infant astride her shoulder, which does not prevent her from carrying a pot full of water on her head. While she is working in the fields she puts her baby on the ground, near the path which threads the crops, in the shadow of the maize. The baby does not always have something to lie on, but rolls in the furrow, puts earth in its mouth, screams, sleeps and gets used to it all. If it cries 853 too loud, any passing mother will give it her breast.

854 The child stays at home until his fifth year. He soon gets used to the company of the animals there. Before 857 long he is capable of looking after them and can take the

553 rite. Three rush baskets filled with different kinds of grain
852 are brought into the room. One supports the sieve in which
the infant is lying. When it is time for the bath, the mid-
wife shakes the sieve, as if to sift both the child and the corn.
Then she puts the grain back into the basket, wraps up the
child and sprinkles a few grains upon it.

853 The word *filâma*, used for the weaning of children, is
243 also used for the tenth and last watering of the maize. Sweet
431 cakes are given to the workers that day, as to the mother,
465 for it is the last day of suckling.

243 Harvest is always accompanied by symbolic acts.
777 Before reaping begins, the best ears are taken and plaited
789 into a kind of doll called the 'Bride of the Corn', which is
hung up in the house to bring good luck during the ensuing
year. Similarly, to bind the chain of life, the biggest grains
are mixed with the seed for the next sowing, and a few fine
loaves are slipped into the heap on the threshing-floor to
be winnowed and sieved.

782 Mgr Khouzam, reporting on his pastoral visit in Novem-
789 ber 1937, wrote as follows: "On entering their houses, I
blessed water, bread and corn. They drank some of the water
and used the rest to sprinkle themselves, their cattle and
their houses. The corn they flung into their fields. As for
the bread, I was made to break it and eat a little of it. The
rest they kept among their stores that God might bless
what they had laid by."

789 The joy of harvest shines also on those who have not
465 ploughed, but whose work in the village has benefited the
431 whole community. Tradition allots the first fruits of the
735 harvest to the reciter, the barber, the cantor of the mosque,
248 the schoolmaster and the carpenter. After these have
claimed their sheaves, the poor come to glean their share.
Cotton-picking, however, gives rise to no sort of ceremony.
This is perhaps because cotton has only recently been
introduced; or because it is grown for profit and not for
daily bread (").

245 The date palm, on the contrary, is as old as Egyptian
agriculture itself, and figures at all times in the life of the
people. They turn to this tree for shade and for roofing, for
beds and coops, for ropes and brushes. We have seen its